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Fire Department Creates Information Database

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The Hartford Fire Department is seeking the public's help in collecting information for a database officials say could help firefighters react more effectively in emergencies.

The Community Safety Information program will allow responders to access critical information such as a resident's special medical needs to the number of children and pets living at an address.

Fire officials put out a call Wednesday asking residents and business owners to supply such personal information, saying those details will be a critical part of a new response program that is the first of its kind nationwide.

For example, if firefighters know that a home's resident uses a wheelchair or has asthma, they can anticipate the need for special help and medical care. Likewise, when responding to calls involving hazardous materials or other public health dangers, firefighters can type a few keystrokes and immediately map the radius that might need to be evacuated.

"I honestly believe this is the most progressive thing accomplished since we went from horse-drawn apparatus to motorized apparatus in the Hartford Fire Department," Fire Chief Charles A. Teale said.

The Community Safety Information program was among several advancements in the department's emergency response system that city fire officials previewed Wednesday.

Teale and other fire officials said Wednesday that the number of calls each year has quadrupled since May 2001, when the fire department became the first responding agency to all medical calls in the city.

With so many calls to answer and several types of apparatus to dispatch, having a computerized system that firefighters can access from laptop computers inside their trucks gives them details to help them respond appropriately, fire officials said.

The new system includes global positioning system technology (GPS) so they can view images of the address where the call originated, and surrounding structures that might be vulnerable.

It also includes specifics from the city's geographic information system, such as the location of nearby hydrants and water lines, and details about the structure; and a

program that pinpoints the location of all city fire vehicles at any time.

"I kid you not, only six years ago every firefighter on this job had to fill out reports on carbon copy paper," said Daniel Nolan, deputy chief for training. "Going to this system is like going from the Flintstones to the Jetsons overnight."

The majority of the funds to buy the equipment and launch the system came from the federal Fire Act Grant, part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and its Office of Domestic Preparedness.

Hartford fire crews started using the system last week, but waited until Wednesday to officially present it so they could work out any last-minute questions or glitches, Teale said.

People who want to volunteer details about their homes or businesses, special needs of the occupants or other information for the Community Safety Information portion of the system can contact Lt. Edwin Diaz at EdwinDiaz@hartford.gov or at 860-522-4888, Ext. 5872.

More information is available on the department's website: www.hartford.gov/fire.

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